



Persona Grata

Carrie Lee Connel

Persona Grata

Also by the author:

A Day in Pieces (Harmonia Press, 2013)

Persona Grata

Carrie Lee Connel

Harmonia Press

Persona Grata

©2016 by Carrie Lee Connel

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, with the exception of excerpts for the purpose of literary review, without the expressed permission of the publisher.

Published by Harmonia Press, London, Ontario

Website: harmoniapress.blogspot.com

Email: harmoniapress@hotmail.com

Front Cover Photo: Andreas Gripp (Quebec fountain)

Author Photo: Andreas Gripp (Western Fair, London)

Text font is Calibri 12pt.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Connel, Carrie Lee, 1967-, author

Persona grata / Carrie Lee Connel.

Poems.

ISBN 978-1-927734-13-1 (paperback)

I. Title.

PS8605.O5634P47 2016 C811'.6 C2016-904232-4

Contents

Will you let me love you?	1
Persona Grata	3
Angel-in-Law	4
Poets in the Window	5
Too Old to Die Young	6
Twenty-seven: Jimi, Janice, Jim	8
Against the Errant	9
Meniere's Disease	10
Eye of God	11
Into the Silence	12
Sisters	13
The Koran in Christian Hands	14
Nametag	15
#love-ku	16
Marriage Blessing (#love-ku 2)	17
Hands	18
Where'd You Go?	19
Becoming Margaret Atwood	20
CanLit	21
After Reading 114 Pages of Colum McCann's <i>Let the Great World Spin</i>	22
Based on a True Story	23
Reading <i>Fight Club</i>	24
Pieces III	25
Collection	26
Anchor	28
Beacon	29
It's a Simpsons' Sky	30
This London is not That London	31

I Don't Watch the News Anymore	33
Ambush	34
Degenerate Goddess	35
One in Five	36
Only Child	37
Mood Ring	38
The Hatter	39
Love	40
Wedding Dress	41

Acknowledgements

Sisters was originally published in *Moon Shine: A Canadian Poetry Collection* (Craigleigh Press, 2015)

Becoming Margaret Atwood and *Where'd You Go?* first appeared in *A Day In Pieces* (Harmonia Press, 2013)

Beacon, It's a Simpsons' Sky, and *This London is not That London* are also published in *Another London: poems from a city still searching for itself* (Harmonia Press, 2016)

Twenty-seven: Jimi, Janice, Jim was published in *phati'tude Literary Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 2

This book is dedicated to my husband, Andreas Gripp

Will you let me love you?

Embracing aloneness and at-one-ness
in a world focused on nuclear existence;
it was not happenstance in which
I perceived a shining light on the periphery
of what I thought I needed.

Instead the glowing comfort of familiarity:
a smile and sparkling eyes, a warm embrace
amid the anxiety we both face in the world.

I play the straight man to your Vaudeville shtick;
try to match wit for wit,
but fail to strike your funny bone
as often as you knock against mine.

We've revealed our secrets in confidence,
knowing a gentle commiseration
when we talk of unreciprocated future hopes.

We are the wordsmiths trying to step away:
for me a petulant silence from the inspiring Muse;
for you a tiredness of maintaining appearances
in a city that thinks on a different plane.

And this city is home as we are home-bodies;
planning to see amazing sights
but sleep in our own beds at night.

We prefer a world of gentler times
that Austen propounded
and Bergman consigned to black and white.

When last we strolled by the river,
I suppressed a yearning to take your hand,
merging bubbles of personal space,
but only touched your shoulder in appeasement.

And next I saw you
I wondered about the feel
of your beard beneath my fingertips;
thought of your lips against mine,
intentionally pressed breasts against chest
in a hard hug goodbye,
desiring to hold tight to what could be.

Persona grata

I pulled one of your books
from my shelf,
read it page after page,
sequentially as you said,
to understand the dramatic monologue.
This fictional woman who denies
the advances of your narrator
is not me, but the words flame.
I recognize myself in them
and try to remember if you
expressed any phrase
to my cold heart armoured
by years of hurt and disappointment.
And I feel the ice melt just a little,
as it has done each time
you share a smile.

Angel-in-Law

She gazes from her solitary perch,
amongst her possessions that you saved,
into a world we cannot see.

An angel for half your life,
you near the age when
cancer claimed the irreplaceable.

You say she would have loved me,
the one who retrieved your heart
from the years of disappointment.

You've yet to admit me
to her emerald parlour,
decorated in yellow mums.

Perhaps introductions are not required;
she is forever your guardian
and I will meet her one day.

Poets in the Window

We thought it would be romantic
to write together at the café
on a January afternoon.

Our cocoon of silence
a privacy screen against
the cacophony of
 eaters and sippers
 gossipers and complainers
 coughers and sneezers
harbouring from the deep-freeze cold snap.

Poets in the window viewing the world on display:
 walkers huddled into their coats;
 drivers determined to enter spaces
 reduced by slush;
 patrons turned away for lack of tables.

We are reluctant to break,
and eat the lunches
delivered by harried waitresses,
wanting to stay in the zone of words and love
that only we know
and the world, viewing us,
can merely guess.

Too Old to Die Young

I am too old now to die young
and be the tragic heroine.
I hermit-ize against apocalyptic prophesies
while the sky is falling one plane at a time.
The seas boil up with invisible monsters
wrapping tentacles around crowded ships.
The dead wash up on shore while the survivors ask
the age-old question “why, God, why?”

I am not so curious now to wonder what
he found on the Other Side;
when at 23 the epilepsy forced him
to sever the thread of earthly existence.
Was he led to soul triage,
told “It’s okay to check out
at a time of your choosing,”
while his mother screamed at his graveside,
“I want my boy!”?

I am too in love now to take my life
since it is not mine to do as I please.
Joined with a lover, hearts beat
in the synchronicity that paired our paths,
held in check by desires basic to all life.

The day will come when one must part,
but secretly wish to say,
“After you, my dear; I’ll be just behind.”

Twenty-seven: Jimi, Janis, Jim

J & J & J

took the bull by the balls

J found truth

in the burning

& J reached for

the hand of the goddess

(an inch too short)

& J said

“enough

they made us what we

never intended to be

gods on pedestals

so even we

lost sight

of the earth”

Against the Errant

This time, I wear my wedding ring
like armour, not the shackles
of enslavement.

It is a flag hoisted, signaling “beware”
when I push my glasses
up my nose.

Your crusade for my heart
returned me from the hell of Acre,
not to Rome or Britain

but to the New World,
an exploration of all
that is yet to come.

Meniere's Disease

The famous suffer as I suffer:

Van Gogh sliced cartilage and flesh,
sending the conch to a lover
so she could hear his torment.

Its alias falls off the tongue in clear notes:

Tin-ni-tus.

How do I hear the silence on the other side?

A constant, ever-present companion

keeps sleep at odds with sanity;

banishes contentment to a far-away world.

But what if this condition that drives the mind
to desperate acts – needles bursting ear drums –
is not the devil's chatter
but the voice of God, misinterpreted?

Eye of God

My desire for perfection
frustrates me.
It should be simple,
winding yarn around
two sticks – a child's craft.
Three, four, five false starts
then a voice said, *Just do your best.*
And I wound and turned,
wound and turned,
changed colours,
embellished with sequins,
added beads, a tinkling bell,
a feather and white plastic flowers.
In the end,
it is a perfect
reflection of me.

In the Silence

In the silence,
I want to hear my voice.
Breathe in deep and exhale
the vibration of a pure note.
Hear vowels and consonants,
diphthongs and nasal tonality.
I want to hear me sing:
a simple Beatles song
or an enlightened verse;
a Kirtan chant
or a raunchy blues lyric.
In the absence of timbre,
I hear a wind chime,
gently pushed by an unseen hand.
I hear my heart's rhythm,
the thrum of the deep E string,
tying me to all existence.
The fulcrum Middle C
balancing treble and bass.
When we are released from our vow,
I realize I have nothing to say out loud
for ears that have heard their own perfection
in major and minor heart chords.
We sang it all
into the silence.

Sisters

St. Francis named them in his *Laudes Creaturarum*:

Sister Moon, the cloistered nun
in the shroud of night,
shakes her head at the hubris of man;
Earth shadows transform the benign smile
to a frown of consternation
at the high tide of terror.

Sister Water follows conductor Moon
ebbing and rising on salt-born breath
or in the fresh taste of veins
that run through her sibling's
muddy concavities.

Sister Mother Earth cries in vain
to be heard over the industrial rattle,
constantly turning away from Luna
in the embarrassment of clear-cut lands
that bleed life through a rusty chalice.

Sister Bodily Death, millennia-weary,
wishes to join a simple orbit
spreading meager light to lead the faithful
to the kingdom of heavenly rest,
but Sister Moon is in her habit.

The Koran in Christian Hands

He wants commiseration
for his beliefs that the Koran says
50 times to kill the infidel.
I don't believe that, I say,
knowing *kāfir* originally meant ungrateful.

With pre-conceived notions
he will read Muhammad's words,
his heart as closed as his mind.
Choosing hate over love,
he'll be blind to the message:
Allah is goodness,
the grateful will be rewarded.

He brandishes the book,
says the word for love
is only about food.
But if food is the way
to a man's heart, and
loaves and fishes
fed the multitude, and
food is the centre of
family celebration,
is that so bad?

Nametag

At alumni events I am given a nametag
that says I belong here,
I'm one of you, on equal footing,
on the same rung of the steel ladder,
at least until it branched off
like a Meccano construction
screwed together from different boxes.
The plastic holder, on a noose around the neck,
chooses not to cooperate,
turning away from prying eyes
into the obscurity of my dark jacket.

Event planners have now done away
with nametags on strings;
instead, a fabric-friendly label
adheres to the right-side of my shirt.
No more haphazard anonymity –
yes, I have a Masters in such-and-such.
No, I don't work in the field –
and you may think any number of things
which ultimately don't matter except to you.
They are just labels,
meant to be stripped off
and thrown away,
until the next event.

#love-ku

Walking life alone
Paths crossed, familiar place
You are my centre

Marriage Blessing (#love-ku 2)

Love and prayer are paired
This Valentine's Day blessing
Surprised witnesses

Hands

You put your hand
beside mine on the tabletop,
comparing thick-knuckled and arthritic
to dainty and small.
“Look,” you say.
We both see our grandmother’s hands.

I remember a yellow kitchen,
grey painted table,
scent of cinnamon.
Slow motion game:
hand over hand over hand.
No winner but Love.

In my hands
I see my past,
I accept my future:
gnarled but still loving hands
reaching for others
in a tender embrace.

Where'd you go?

And if tomorrow you didn't see me,
would you wonder where I was
or would you have forgotten?
I return with groceries,
surprising you out of reverie.
Were you reliving a memory of me
or a scene from a long-forgotten movie?
It eats away the mementos of a lifetime;
a cancer on a path of destruction
through your temporal lobes.
Fleeting moments of lucidity:
the chance to say "I love you"
and receive the perfect response.
How much of who you are
will remain at the last?

Becoming Margaret Atwood

I read poetry to fill the time,
since my anxious mind cannot grasp
more than elusive images
or incomplete thoughts.
These are universal truths
that a woman 28 years my senior
tattooed on paper 40 years ago.
And I understand
on a level deeper than words
my mother ever spoke.
I denied her existence
until forced to shred
the skin of verse
down to bone.
Now I can't shake her.
What was once intangible
sits at my core:
an uncomfortable stone,
swallowed for safe keeping,
embedded in stomach lining.

CanLit

Youths discount the value of reading
female Canadian authors,
ordered by high school teachers
to delve into

Laurence,
Atwood,
Munro.

In my maturity, I discovered
Lawson,
Hay,
and Gibb,
whose novels are beautiful
and identifiable.

The Other Side of the Bridge
could not be set in New York;
nor *Late Nights on Air* in LA.
The Petty Details of So-And-So's Life
would not sit well in Paris.

The luxury is now mine
to go back, to explore
The Stone Diaries,
The Handmaid's Tale,
Dance of the Happy Shades,
but I don't feel the need.

**After Reading 114 Pages of Colum McCann's
*Let the Great World Spin***

The cliché.

How many times have I said it in my life?

My head hurts.

Headache, migraine, tension, cluster, sinus.

Why haven't my kidneys failed from all
the aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen.

Have that first morning coffee, or better yet,
two Extra Strength Tylenol

washed down with a can of Coke.

Fall asleep to Liev Schreiber narrating
Secrets of the Dead,
pillow-talk me into oblivion.

Wake again and feel like a person,
not a throbbing red blob
zombie-walking through life.

Enjoy a movie, a book, an evening out
until I sleep again.

Wake in the morning and

my head hurts.

Must be the weather, a low moving in.
I can't stop the world from spinning.

Based on a True Story

She reads through the fiction she wrote.

Is that how it happened? Well, no.

She's taken some liberties

with timing and dialogue:

Like putting their meeting before his incarceration,

as if she's an oasis on the edge of the final push

across the desert.

She doesn't know how it truly transpired.

What led up to

the beating,

the accusations,

the arrest,

the time locked up –

Only that she believed him when he told her.

She wonders if she has the right to tell the story

even though she played a part in it.

But isn't it important to tell?

That people should know these things occur,

that innocents and innocence exist.

Reading *Fight Club*

Edward Norton walks across my mind's eye,
his voice occupies my ears.

Do I identify with this schizophrenic deviant,
a rebel in a torture chamber of his mind,
the one who holds the whip in self-flagellation?

Or is it the non-existent Tyler Durdan?
It can't possibly be Marla Singer.

I never saw myself a dishevelled witch
but maybe I should:
her freedom to commit Xanax-cide
and still call out for help.

It's funny how a book
can fit your mood.

Pieces III

I say *pull yourself together;*
heartbreak will not kill you.

But how many days
can I spend in pieces
before I dissolve away?
How many moments
do I profess my love
only to receive a goofy smile
or *there, there, my friend*
in return?

The young have a term for it:
they call it friend-zone.

Relegated to the sidelines
watching the game unfold
from the spectators' row.

Not to say he's a player –
far from it.

My mistakes add up like bookie marks;
is this how I repay the debt
piece by piece?

Collection

The collection of 19th Century novels
dwindles each year.

As I pare out the ones that won't
be read,

those that linger

wait to feel tender hands,

tidy fingers turning reverent pages.

Those once read and remain,

left over from university classes,

realize they won't be read again

yet are grateful for the sentimentality

that reserves their place on the shelf.

Emma said to Jane (Ms. Eyre),

"We could never be friends,

but you may teach the Knightley children."

Holmes kicked Watson out

to join Gerard and Sir Nigel

on the battlefields.

And Wilkie would fall in love

with Charlotte

in this present time.

"Leave the devil's drink alone,

dear Poe," says DeQuincey.

"Come sleep with angels in my den."

The ladies Gaskell and Burney,
kept in anticipation,
wait to reveal the emancipation
of the fairer sex,
to which Gilman and Chopin say *desist*.
Shelley wrote more about her monster,
but *The Last Man*,
lost in the tomb of tomes,
has yet to be introduced.

Anchor

Submerged in a wave of noise,
tossed on a sea of speech and screams,
thundering bass drums batter
the hull of personal space.
Tire squeals mistaken for the screech of terns.

It is a citified cacophony.

Lost in daily commotion,
spying for an island of calm,
the weight of words moors
anxious thoughts.
Each page holds me
steadfast upon the bridge,
navigating channels and shoals.
The current flows
to port and starboard,
preventing my vessel
from being overwhelmed.

Beacon

A beacon on the horizon
seen from small town four-corners –
an intersection of childhood and maturity.
The 401 a yellow-lined road
to the lighthouse of knowledge.
Bathed in cloud-reflected orange,
this treed city boasts a natural charm.
A stopover for some whose
roots are embedded elsewhere;
a full stop for others when home
was a culturally-deprived shanty town.
Richmond Row glitters
not quite so bright as Broadway,
and yes, the sparkle tarnishes
with passing years.

It's a Simpsons' Sky

When I say it's a Simpsons' sky,
you know exactly what I mean.

Waiting for the LTC, I stand
in the shade of a hydro pole,
the sun dissected,
trying to peek from either side.
Why can we never see
the clouds skitter?

You would think the buffeting
wind at earth level would
send the clouds scattering
but they just hang;

no destination except east,
perhaps doubling back
to check out the bikini-clad
chick in her backyard,

resuming when pushed along
by those next in line
who also want to see.

This London is not That London

Christopher Wren did not design our St. Paul's.
The Delta Armouries is a shade
smaller than Buckingham Palace.
City Hall pales in its '60s modernity
to the new space-age building
near the other Thames.
The castle on the hill
is an Ivory tower of cap and gown prestige,
the ruler paid a king's ransom.
The majesty of Windsor Castle, Kensington Palace,
and Hampton Court
is not mirrored by Windermere Manor,
Elsie Perrin Estate, or Silverwood Mansion.
Our Soho aspires to gentrification
while theirs is flamboyant in rainbows.
Kingsmill's has retired
but Harrods marches on.
Shopping on chic Richmond Row
is no comparison to vintage Carnaby Street:
Layman House evaporated long ago.
A quick walk around the block of Victoria Park
is a pallid substitute for a Sunday afternoon
Regent's stroll.

The London Zoo houses thousands of animals
yet Storybook Gardens let a seal slip by.
No bears named Via share
the limelight with Paddington.
Our haze of allergens,
trapped in the bowl of landscape,
is as blinding for some as their pea soup fog.
This Covent Garden still boasts
farm fresh vegetables and lov-er-ly flowers.
Our double-decker serves ice cream
to the hot and harried.
How strange for island Londoners
to happen upon social media events
only to be informed that
land-locked London is groovier by far.

I Don't Watch the News Anymore

I don't watch the news anymore.
Social media fills the void.
Acquaintances inform on
the latest shooting atrocity;
sibling expounds political views;
friends present their causes.

I was born into the idealism of
the Summer of Love,
but the hippies have gone
into retirement.
Lessons learned forgotten.
We look back and see
 suffragettes turned away in disgust,
 the fist crushed the bloom of feminism,
 the civil rights movement failed,
 pogroms run pandemic,
 imagined peace is still just a dream.

I don't watch the news anymore.
Time spent deciphering and cataloguing
the world into some sense of order
leads only to pistol-whipping anxiety,
overwhelming hopelessness
or lackadaisical attitudes
in a society resistant to change.

Ambush

Ambushed by a memory
on the point
of slipping into slumber.

Saboteur of good moods:
unsuspected sniper
bursting yellow balloons of hope.

Guerrilla warfare
in the maze of walls
built to contain

a myriad of monsters.
Insurgent insomnia wounds
innocence with a bomb blast.

Degenerate Goddess

Friendships end when we realize
we were only acquaintances
sharing moments of drunkenness,
commiserating over deadlines.
At one time, numbering twenty,
dwindled down to less than ten.
Calling ourselves Dirty Girls
and you have the tattoo, among others, to prove it.
Kicked out of what brought us together,
left off the invitation list,
sounding catty, I know.
But it's okay now.
I won't put a bumper sticker
on an Aston Martin.

One in Five

for Paulie O'Bryne – www.im1in5.com

One in four before sixteen
makes you one in five for life.
You've paid the dues
to a club you didn't
subscribe to join,
every member anonymous,
recruited unaware
by men and women in authority:
paper tigers preying
on those who pray it will stop.
The taboo cycles through generations
without a break –
innocent hearts excepted.
Applaud the celebrities and hockey stars,
not immune to others' depravity,
who said it happened to me.
To tell your story is not taboo;
it is only yours to tell:
 the plans waylaid by anxiety
 the nights that are the darkest
 the fixation on a fix of forgetting
 the desire to check out the Other Side
You are part of a statistic.
You survived.

Only Child

She tells me of his life
like he's from another family,
completely separate
from the one that raised me.
There was a time we might have been friends
then both moved into new lives
and he indicated I shouldn't waste
money on long-distance
so I stopped calling.
I am the forgotten aunt
to his three children,
self-inviting to birthday parties,
looking for connections,
recognition that I belong.
I am the extreme voyeur
positioned in the shadows.
Lost and alone in memories
of being lost and alone.

Mood Ring

My mood ring doesn't know what colour to be.
Sliding effortlessly through hues in
a triskelion of gold, copper, silver.
Amber swirls amidst the grey-black
of an anxiety attack.
Manic dark blue is rarely seen.
Instead the steady sheen of algae on a pond
reminding me of an emerald birthstone;
sometimes the curse of an iridescent
like one once given in love,
but not the one that reflected
inconstancy and change,
opaque as a mask worn
to hide your true nature.
I strive for balance and know
that to be blue,
for once,
would be good.

The Hatter

The novelty of a hat shop
within ancient Quebec City
quickly evaporated.
He assured us his was
the best in all of Canada.
While I chose a navy wool fedora
for you to try on,
he pegged the favourite
you wore on the train
as cheaply made in China.
For me, he presented
a pale yellow cloche
bedecked in brown ribbons;
I exclaimed it wasn't
quite my style. He said:
"Right now, madam, you have no style."
He followed as we in our chagrin
stepped out onto the sidewalk
to continue our afternoon stroll,
telling us not to worry about him,
business was just fine,
merci beaucoup.

Love

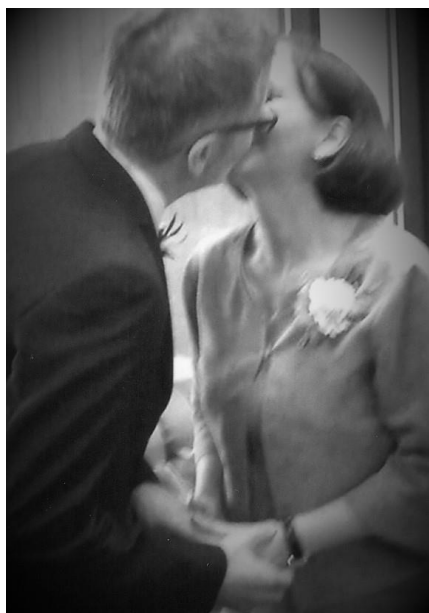
I've exchanged my favourite
four-letter word for another
in deference to your sensibilities.
I try not to take the Lord's name in vain
but you must know
my exclamation is a prayer
for the driver or cyclist
in need of a balm
for his or her stupidity;
and the feeling behind it
is the four-letter word
you share with me every day.

Wedding Dress

The dress I wore to my second wedding
was not traditional white.
I vehemently refused to purchase again
a dress to wear only once,
while those adamant that I should
wear something new to start our life together
said I could wear it on New Year's;
but we're not midnight people.

On the day I donated that first dress,
a full-skirted white brocade,
I knew it was an ending
and time would change the life I led.

To the ceremony at City Hall,
I wore a favourite Jackie O,
reminiscent of classic movies,
worn to other weddings
and the date I was so nervous to ask you out on.
You wore the matching tie we bought together.



Harmonia Press

Poetry



Carrie Lee Connel is a writer of fiction and poetry. Her first book of poems, *A Day in Pieces*, was published by Harmonia Press in 2013. She lives in London, Ontario, with her husband and two cats, Mila and Mabel.

ISBN 978-1-927734-13-1

\$10.00